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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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~ Apple's Latest Creation ~ People Are Talking! ~ China Slams Clinton!
~ MS: IP Address Storage ~ Non-Latin Web Names! ~ Firefox 3.6 Released!
~ Hacking Passwords Easy! ~ Web Access Hits Space! ~ Chavez: Games Poison!

~ PS3 Motion Controller! ~

~ Older Players Targeted!

-* China: We Are Biggest Victim! *-
-* Microsoft Fixes Browser Flaw, Breach *-
-* MS Promises Early Patch for IE Zero-Day! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Gotta tell ya, the weather in these parts has really sucked lately! Lots of snow and cold temperatures - I'm tired of winter already and I can't wait for Spring to arrive! Too much snow in too short of a time for my tastes!

Speaking of the weather, it has certainly changed here in Massachusetts! In a special election held this past week to fill Ted Kennedy's vacant seat in the U.S. Senate, Republican Scott Brown soundly defeated his Democratic opponent, Martha Coakley. Right off the bat, I will admit that I voted for Brown. I did so as much to vote against Coakley as I did for supporting Brown. As far as I'm concerned, Coakley is an arrogant candidate. She started campaigning to fill the vacancy even before Kennedy's tributes were over. As a Democrat, she had a lot of support in this state because it was in the same party as Kennedy. And she knew it. And that's where she got cocky. Early in the "campaign", she held a lead of about 30 percentage points - seemingly insurmountable in a Democratic state. She resorted to an extremely negative campaign. In the weeks to come, her lead continued to dwindle. On the other hand, Brown's campaign took on a look of "I'm just a regular guy". And he seemed to be as his campaign portrayed. My only disappointment was the debate in which he and Coakley seemingly controlled the debate with a lot of "tit-for-tat" accusations and taunts against one another.

Well, we got past that, and Brown went back to his roots and pulled off a positive campaign while Coakley continued her attacks. She kept working things to garner Kennedy supporters. She kept focusing on "fear" tactics. She kept turning off the voters in this state.

I have to admit that I wasn't sure that Brown could win; it's difficult to figure out the voters in this state. There are lots of Independent Party members whose votes are usually undecided until near the end. But, Coakley's lead in the polls crashed, and Brown moved into the lead as the election date got closer. And as you're all likely aware at this time, Scott Brown went on to take an incredible victory and soundly defeated Coakley.

While I do not agree with all of Brown's platforms, I do agree with his views on the Healthcare bill, and hope it will now be defeated and end up going back to the drawing board to be done right. I don't disagree with a healthcare bill, necessarily, but I don't want to see one rammed down our throats just so it can be said it became a done deal. Too much politics involved in such an important issue - sit down and do the right thing, not just the thing.

So, we'll see what comes about over the next few weeks in the Senate. At least we won't see Martha Coakley anywhere near the Beltway anytime soon! Thankfully!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING  
compiled by Joe Mirando  
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone and there's really not much to say about the Atari world that hasn't been said a couple of hundred times before.

Of course, I could hammer at you about volunteering or donating things to the local homeless shelter or soup kitchen, but you've already heard me yammer on about that, right?

Then, there's politics. There's always something I can complain about in the world of politics, right? Yeah, true enough.

I do want to spend just a minute or so talking about the special election in Massachusetts for the Senate seat vacated when Ted Kennedy passed away.

To begin with, I loved Teddy. A very good friend of mine dated a girl on his staff years ago. She was always telling my friend what a truly good guy Kennedy was and that he genuinely cared about everyone he came into contact with. I've heard the same thing, over and over again, from just about anyone who had any kind of dealings with him.

It often seemed to me that, despite Kennedy's political savvy, he was a guy who sometimes just plain needed to leave it behind for a while. I have two favorite "Teddy" anecdotes which I, of course, will relate to you now.

The first was told to me by this friend I mentioned. He had put together a birthday party for the young woman he was dating, who just happened to be a staffer for Senator Kennedy. Now, this friend of mine is something of a... oh, let's say 'male appendage' and leave it at that, okay? Well, anyway he, according to his recounting of the story, 'cornered' Senator Kennedy in the restroom while washing his hands, and bombarded him with questions on why he'd voted a particular way on a particular bill or why we had to do such-and-such. With each question, the good senator gave a thoughtful, cogent answer without condescending and without pretense. He was genuinely happy, it seems, to explain anything he could.

The second anecdote is one I remember from a newspaper story, I believe. It was during Bill Clinton's re-election campaign, and the Clintons had just arrived at the beach of the 'Kennedy Compound' in Hyannisport, Massachusetts. Of course, even at the Kennedy Compound, it wasn't every day that a sitting U.S. President was scheduled to arrive, so there were

quite a few people around... Ted Kennedy and his sister in law Jackie Kennedy Onassis among them.

If memory serves, the Clintons were arriving by sea plane right on the water in front of the Kennedy buildings. The reporters swarmed and the locals craned their necks and Jackie "up the beach" leaned over to the Senator and said, "Teddy, there's a mob down there. You should go down and make sure the Clintons get up here okay."

"That's okay," Teddy replied, "Maurice (Tempelsman, her companion) is down there already."

Jackie reportedly sighed and tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention and punctuate her point as she said, "MAURICE doesn't have a Senate campaign to win, Teddy."

I don't know whether that story says more about Teddy or Jackie... or Maurice or even the Clintons, but I still get a little bit of a kick out of it.

Why did I just tell you those stories? I have no idea... other than the fact that I get a kick out of them, I just don't know. It's not that I don't think this new guy, this Scott Brown guy, isn't of the same ilk (although he isn't). I DO think that he's darned lucky that he was running against someone who was as unpopular as Martha Coakley was for as many reasons, that he ran as GOOD a campaign as she ran a BAD one.

And to be fair, it looks to me like he DID run a darned good campaign. I haven't heard complaints of 'dirty tricks' or of 'smear tactics', just that the people genuinely didn't like his opponent. While that may be painful for her... and for democrats in general, it doesn't seem to me that he ran a dirty campaign... just a hard one.

His election DOES mean tough times for the democrats in the senate, since the republicans can, if they choose to do so, filibuster any and every piece of legislation that the democrats try to put up.

Y'know what? Let 'em! That kind of thing is great in a Jimmy Stewart movie, but when it comes to real life, having someone threaten "the nuclear option" every time there's a piece of legislation gets real old, real fast. Let them threaten to filibuster... as a matter of fact, FORCE them to do it. Filibusters aren't inconvenient for just the majority party. They're inconvenient for everyone. And I'm betting the blustering buffoons don't have the stomach or the stamina to do it time after time after time.

And yeah, the election of Scott Brown to the senate puts the health care bill in jeopardy. But, quite honestly, the bill in its current form just isn't what it should be. In its current state it does little more than guarantee insurance companies millions more 'customers' by mandating that everyone have insurance. I don't see too much on OUR side of the equation to balance the scale. If it doesn't pass, it's my hope that they whole legislative branch of our government goes back to square one and builds a bill that actually DOES something for us.

But my concern right now is not the health care bill. It's everything that comes AFTER the health care bill. We've got a lot of stuff we've got to tackle, and having 42% of the Senate block anything from happening by simple parliamentary procedure is just unacceptable. I think that there should be some.. downside to using the filibuster. I don't know what, but

there should be some reason to NOT invoke it except for in extreme circumstances. The filibuster was concocted FOR extreme circumstances, not to just 'not lose' even though you should.

The other thing I want to mention is Haiti. Last week we talked about how bad things were there. Every talking head on every show on every station (except for those that cuddle up to that idiot Pat Robertson) covered every problem from every angle. I dare say that, between all of them, every problem and possibility had been covered... Except for another earthquake. I'm sorry folks, but a 6.1 on the Richter scale isn't an aftershock, that's a SHOCK. A bonafide earthquake all on its own. And the two that hit the other day, both 5.0s. That's a lot of heartache in a small corner of a small island (Haiti takes up about a third of the island of Hispaniola, in case you hadn't heard it a zillion times already this past week).

Just be glad that you're not in Haiti. Or, if you ARE in Haiti, be glad that you're one of the ones that survived. I don't often solicit prayers, but if you're so inclined, I think this would be a good time for a good cause. 'Nuff said.

Well that's it for this time around, kiddies. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they're saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!  
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Sony Delays PS3 Motion Controller Launch to Autumn

Sony Corp said it would postpone the launch of a motion controller, or wireless controlling device, for its PlayStation 3 to the autumn of 2010 from this spring, marking the second delay of a major product release in as many weeks.

The controller, when used with a special camera for the PS3, detects the movement of the user's hand and the location of the user, and will likely give Sony more of an edge in competition with Nintendo Co Ltd's

Wii game machine.

The Wii, which far outsells the PS3 and Microsoft Corp's Xbox 360, features a controller that allows users to direct onscreen play, for example by swinging it like a bat.

Microsoft is planning to launch its controller-less game system Project Natal by this year's holiday season.

Sony's game division said it is delaying the launch so that more software titles will be available to make the most of the new controller's functions.

The delay follows a Sony announcement last week that it would postpone the launch of the latest version of its blockbuster racing game series "Gran Turismo," which was due to be launched in March. A new launch date has not been set.

Prior to the announcement, shares in Sony closed down 0.2 percent at 3,060 yen, outperforming the Tokyo stock market's electrical machinery index, which fell 0.9 percent.

New Arsenal of Shooter Videogames Target Older Players

Coming to a video game console near you, an onslaught of new military-themed shooter games - and they're not all for children as game publishers target a more mature audience.

The popularity of shooter games has been proven by Activision Blizzard's "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2" which has raked in over \$1 billion worldwide and counting.

Sony Computer Entertainment America is the latest game publisher to target this genre with "MAG," or Massive Action Game, and throws 256 players - the largest multiplayer experience for a video game - into a global oil crisis.

Gamers can chose to work for one of three competing private military companies and battle alongside and against other player-controlled avatars in real-world locations.

"I think what we have done differently ... is that we've created real cause and effect within the many different objectives and sub-objectives that have to be done to win the war, just like a real battlefield," said Brian Soderberg, president and co-founder of Zipper Interactive, "MAG" developer.

With Sony seeing strong hardware sales in 2009, "MAG" is one of the game maker's key exclusive offerings for 2010 with it's sights are set squarely at the lifeblood of the game industry.

"The core audience of shooter games remains 13 to 34 year old males, who make up more than 60 percent of the total audience, but the genre has broadened its appeal in recent years with popular titles such as "Call of Duty" and "Halo,"" said Michael Cai, vice president of video game research at Interpret.

"Older males and even female gamers have latched on to the genre. A big part of the growing popularity of shooter games can be attributed to online multiplayer functionalities."

That plays right into the core gameplay of "MAG," which uses Sony's PlayStation Network to offer free online gaming for this Teen-rated game.

"What's amazing about "MAG" is that everything that's happening, all the explosions around you and the air strikes that come in, are all the result of real people playing in this game world," said Russ Phillips, studio art director at Zipper Interactive.

Electronic Arts has a pair of modern military shooter sequels with "Army of Two: The 40th Day" and "Battlefield: Bad Company 2." The company is also re-launching its World War II "Medal of Honor" franchise in current-day Afghanistan and aiming it at a Mature audience.

"Parents and those buying games for kids should realize that video games are no longer toys for children," said Mike Snider, videogame reporter for USA Today.

"The average age of a person playing video games is 35 and many games released target adults, just as films such as "Inglorious Basterds" and "The Hurt Locker" are meant for adults."

Gary Witta, a former game developer who wrote Warner Bros. Pictures R-rated \$38.4 million hit "The Book of Eli," believes it's only a matter of time before the mainstream media accepts that video games are no longer made just for kids.

"People are used to the concept of an R-rated movie with violence, language and sexuality because the film industry has been around a lot longer than video games," said Whitta.

"The video game medium has evolved and matured to where games like "Modern Warfare 2" and "Halo" are made primarily for mature audiences."

Kamy Akhavan, managing editor at ProCon.org, said while sales of video games have quadrupled from 1995-2008, the arrest rate for juvenile murders fell 71.9 percent and the arrest rate for all juvenile violent crimes declined 49.3 percent in that period.

"It seems fair for parents to argue that their kids shouldn't play those games, but it also seems fair to argue that those games have not caused our society to become more violent," said Akhavan.

Venezuela's Hugo Chavez Calls PlayStation Games 'Poison'

Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez won't spare a kind word for video games, calling them 'poison' and accusing them of being proxies for capitalist warmongering. According to AFP, the outspoken US critic who once notoriously referred to George W. Bush as "the devil", used his weekly radio-TV show 'Alo Presidente' to put a match to Sony's PlayStation games brand.

"Those games they call 'PlayStation' are poison. Some games teach you to kill. They once put my face on a game, 'you've got to find Chavez to

kill him'."

I'm not sure which game or user mod he's referring to, assuming there actually is one. Perhaps he means Mercenaries 2: World in Flames? You know, Pandemic's "explosive open-world action game," in which "a power-hungry tyrant messes with Venezuela's oil supply, sparking an invasion that turns the country into a war zone"? Pandemic denied the game was meant as a political statement (or an attempt to drum up support for a US invasion of Venezuela) but the developer admitted wanting "to have a rip from the headlines."

Chavez went on in his address to link Western games to slick propaganda vehicles, implying that scenarios in which players "bomb cities or just throw bombs" exist to incite violence against countries like Venezuela so that capitalist countries can "later sell weapons" to the country's opponents.

Games, said Chavez, "promote the need for cigarettes, drugs and alcohol," adding "That's capitalism, the road to hell."

Not all games are bad, however, according to Chavez, who said his country ought to be making "educational games" and designing "little indigenous dolls" to replace dolls "like Barbie, that have nothing to do with our culture."

It's apparently not the first time Chavez has laid into the games industry. AFP reports that Chavez once slammed Nintendo for promoting "selfishness, individualism and violence."

Last October, Venezuela passed a law making the import and sale of toy weapons and violent video games illegal, punishable by between three and five years in jail. The law reportedly goes into effect at the end of this month.

Pro tip for President Chavez: If you don't want the US electorate to ignorantly generalize about you or your country based on punditry and propaganda, then get this much straight: *Don't do it to them*.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

China: We Are Biggest Victim of Cyberattacks

China on Tuesday denied any role in alleged cyberattacks on Indian government offices, calling China itself the biggest victim of hackers.

When asked about Google's allegation that cyberattacks launched from China hit the U.S. search giant, foreign ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu said Chinese companies were also often hit by cyberattacks.

"China is the biggest victim of hacking attacks," Ma said, citing the example of top Chinese search engine Baidu.com being hacked last week.

Google last week said it might exit China after being hit by recent hacking attempts largely aimed at accessing the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists. It also said it planned to hold talks with Chinese authorities about whether it could offer an uncensored version of its local search engine.

Ma said he did not know if Chinese authorities had started talks with Google. A Google spokeswoman did not confirm a Bloomberg news report that Google and China had already started the talks. "That's not what we've been saying," she said in an e-mail.

An Indian official has reportedly said local government offices including that of India's National Security Advisor were also targeted last month by hackers believed to be from China.

Ma said the allegation was baseless.

Microsoft Promises Early Patch for IE Zero-Day

Microsoft announced that it will release an out-of-band patch - meaning a patch that breaks the standard Patch Tuesday release cycle - to address the Internet Explorer flaw at the heart of the attacks in China against Google and other targets. The announcement was short on details, but Microsoft promised to provide more information on Wednesday.

George Stathakopoulos, general manager of the Microsoft Security Response Center (MSRC), stated "We continue to see limited and targeted attacks against Internet Explorer 6 and encourage customers to upgrade to Internet Explorer 8. We also recommend customers consider deploying the workarounds and mitigations provided in Security Advisory 979352 until the security update is ready for broad distribution."

Andrew Storms, director of security operations for nCircle, commented on the unusual step of breaking the Patch Tuesday release cycle. "Given the never-ending lack of attention on the Microsoft IE bug, it was inevitable that [Microsoft] would release a patch on or before their regularly scheduled February release."

It is certainly true that there has been no shortage of media attention devoted to the targeted attacks in China, and the revelation that a zero-day vulnerability in Internet Explorer was apparently a prime attack vector. Germany and France have even added their two cents worth by recommending that everyone abandon IE - at least until a patch is available for the flaw.

The fact that the exploit code for the Internet Explorer vulnerability is now publicly available in-the-wild adds fuel to the fire. Storms points out that in the absence of the international attention on the attacks in China, this flaw probably wouldn't be updated out-of-band. "If the public vulnerability had not been tied to the Google breach announced last week, the bug would have been worrisome, but not nearly as epically perceived by many."

Dan Kaminsky, director of penetration testing for IOActive, offered his own

cautious insight, "We know there is an exploit in the field that is causing some amount of damage using this exploit as its entry point, but this entire situation is defined more by what we don't know than what we do."

Kaminsky is alluding to the veiled and sparse information trickling out about the attacks. The Internet Explorer vulnerability has been confirmed as an attack vector, but there are hints and implications that there are others as well. Google has been identified as a target, along with as many as 30 other organizations - most of which haven't been identified.

The knee-jerk response to lay the blame at Microsoft's feet and scapegoat the Internet Explorer Web browser misses the point and ignores the larger issue that, not only was this a sophisticated and targeted attack, but that a foreign government is accused of perpetrating the attacks and the United States State Department is backing those claims.

An attacker with dedication and resources can find a way to compromise just about any Web browser or operating system. The impact of precision spearphishing attacks such as this, which leverage zero-day vulnerabilities to infiltrate systems and allow the attackers to extract information, is a much more serious security issue than whether or not Internet Explorer gets patched before February 9 (the next regularly-scheduled Patch Tuesday).

nCircle's Storms concurs "While the attacks were successful against many high profile companies, they are still of a limited and highly-targeted nature. For the mass majority of users, careful browsing practices coupled with up to date antivirus will provide significant risk mitigation."

Microsoft Fixes Browser Flaw Used in Google Breach

Microsoft Corp. took the unusual step of issuing an unscheduled fix Thursday for security holes in its Internet Explorer browser that played a role in the recent computer attacks that led Google to threaten to leave China.

The updates are for all supported versions of Internet Explorer, from IE 5.01 up through the newest IE 8.

People who have their computers set to install security updates automatically will get the fix. PC users who don't automatically get updates should go to <http://www.microsoft.com/security> to download the patch.

Microsoft said it learned of the problems last fall and was already planning to release the fixes in February. Last week, it confirmed that the attacks described by Google Inc. took advantage of the same flaw.

Hackers can lure people to Web pages containing malicious code, then exploit the browser flaw to take over their computers. Attackers in China may have used the flaw to break into e-mail accounts of human rights activists who oppose the Chinese government. Hackers may also have used this flaw, among others, to break into Google's own networks and those of other large companies such as Yahoo Inc. and Juniper Networks Inc.

Microsoft seldom releases security patches outside its regular, once-a-month update cycle, but has been known to rush out patches for so-called "zero-day" exploits in which hackers attack a software hole before the company has a chance to find a fix. The last time Microsoft broke from its security update schedule was in July 2009.

China Slams Clinton's Call for Internet Freedom

China on Friday slammed remarks made by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton promoting Internet freedom worldwide, saying her words harmed U.S.-China relations.

China resolutely opposes Clinton's remarks and it is not true that the country restricts online freedom, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu said in a statement on the ministry's Web site.

Clinton's speech and China's response both come after Google last week said it planned to reverse its long-standing position in China by ending censorship of its Chinese search engine. Google cited increasingly tough censorship and recent cyberattacks on the Gmail accounts of human rights activists for its decision, which it said might force it to close its offices in China altogether.

China blocks Web sites including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and has long forced domestic Internet companies to censor their own services. Blog providers, for instance, are expected to delete user posts that include pornographic content or talk of sensitive political issues.

On Thursday in Washington, D.C., Clinton unveiled U.S. initiatives to help people living under repressive governments access the Internet for purposes such as reporting corruption. The U.S. will support circumvention tools for dissidents whose Internet connections are blocked, she said.

China's Ma called for the U.S. "to respect the facts and stop using the issue of so-called Internet freedom to unreasonably criticize China." Chinese law forbids hacking attacks and violations of citizens' privacy, the statement said, apparently referring to the issues raised by Google.

"China's constitution protects the right of citizens to free speech and promoting development of the Internet has been our consistent policy," the statement said. "China has its own national condition and cultural traditions."

U.S. "information hegemony" was also criticized in the state-run newspaper China Daily on Friday in an article about how the Internet is regulated.

China officially had 384 million Internet users at the end of last month, the most in any country.

Apple Plans To Show "Latest Creation" Next Week

Apple Inc. is inviting reporters to an event next week to see what it calls "our latest creation."

The company e-mail Monday offered no specifics about what it would display at the invitation-only Jan. 27 event in San Francisco.

But it comes amid speculation that Apple is close to unveiling a tablet-style touch-screen computer that is bigger than an iPhone but smaller than a standard laptop.

Tablets are one-piece computers with big screens and no keyboards. Such devices have been around since the early 1990s, but haven't seen much success in the mainstream.

An Apple spokesman declined to provide more details on its plans Monday afternoon.

Mozilla Releases Firefox 3.6

Mozilla on Thursday officially released Firefox 3.6, a release that includes a tighter integration of HTML 5, among other features.

The browser boasts speeds that are 20 percent faster than Firefox 3.5, according to Mozilla, as well as performance improvements to Web tasks like e-mail, photo uploads, and social networking.

The latest release is available for download now on the Mozilla Web site for Windows, Mac OS X, and Linux in more than 70 languages.

Other new features include: personas, or themes that allow users to personalize the look of Firefox; a plug-in updater that will detect out-of-date plug-ins to keep users safe from potential security vulnerabilities; stability improvements; form complete; and open video and audio via HTML 5 for full-screen display and poster frames.

For developers, Firefox 3.6 includes support for the latest HTML5 specification, including the File API for local file handling, font support like Web Open Font Format (WOFF), CSS gradients, and device orientation.

More details are available in the full release notes.

The final release comes two days after Mozilla released the second and final release candidate for Firefox 3.6. The RC2 fixed a few bugs found in RC1, which was released on Jan. 11.

Microsoft Cuts IP Address Storage to 6 Months

Microsoft Corp. said Tuesday it would shorten the time it stores Internet users' addresses from Web search queries from 18 months to six months following a request from a European Union data privacy panel.

It said the change would make its Bing search a better choice for privacy-conscious users than the world's leading search engine Google Inc., because Microsoft will delete the entire Internet Protocol address from search queries - the string of numbers that shows a computer's

location.

"We believe that the balance between privacy and efficiency is very much in the mind of consumers," Microsoft's associate general counsel John Vassallo told reporters. "Getting the balance right does make the search engine more attractive."

Microsoft says its search engine has some 2 percent of the European market, well below Google on 80 percent.

Google says keeping data from search queries is important to improving the way it processes search results and "represents a crucial arm in our battle to protect the security of our services against hacks and frauds."

It says it makes users' search details anonymous after nine months and allows people see and control some of the information that is stored on their searches.

Yahoo says it deletes IP addresses and makes user log data anonymous after 90 days, with some exceptions to fight fraud, secure systems and meet legal obligations.

EU data protection officials have questioned the need for search engines to keep data on searches and had asked for a six-month limit.

Microsoft's announcement comes days after the German government warned users against Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser until it fixes a security flaw.

The company will also likely see more competition for the browser, the most widely used, when European users start to see a box urging them to choose between Internet Explorer and rival browsers in coming months - a move that helped end an EU antitrust investigation into the browser.

Four Countries Clear Hurdle for Non-Latin Web Names

Egypt, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the first countries to win preliminary approval for Internet addresses written entirely in their native scripts.

Since their creation in the 1980s, Internet domain names have been limited to the 26 characters in the Latin alphabet used in English, as well as 10 numerals and the hyphen. Technical tricks have been used to allow portions of the Internet address to use other scripts, but until now, the suffix had to use those 37 characters.

An announcement Thursday by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, known as ICANN, paves the way for an entire domain name to appear in Cyrillic or Arabic by the middle of this year. Applications for strings in other languages are pending.

That means Internet users with little or no knowledge of English would no longer have to type Latin characters to access Web pages targeting Russian or Arabic speakers. Although search engines can sometimes help users reach those sites, companies still need to include Latin characters on advertisements.

Users may still need Latin characters for e-mail addresses, though, as Internet technicians finalize standards for e-mail applications that can understand domain names entirely in Cyrillic or Arabic.

ICANN granted preliminary approval to the four countries after years of debate and testing of non-Latin names. Demand for them has been increasing around the world as Internet usage expands among people of different tongues.

Some countries have been issuing domain names partially in non-Latin scripts - with only the suffix using Latin characters. But Egypt, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have not, said Tina Dam, senior director for ICANN's Internationalized Domain Names program.

For the three Arabic-speaking countries, there would have been too much confusion because their language is written right to left, while the Latin portion would be left to right. For Russian, the concern was that Cyrillic and Latin characters looked too similar and would create confusion if mixed in a single Internet address.

These four countries now have to formally request the suffixes, and ICANN's board has to sign off. That's expected now that the ICANN staff has cleared the proposed suffixes to make sure they won't cause technical problems or confusion with existing Latin domain names.

Those suffixes are:

- * The equivalent of "Egypt" in Arabic.
- * "RF" for the Russian Federation, written in Cyrillic.
- * The Arabic equivalent of "AlSaudiah," short for Saudi Arabia.
- * "Emirates" written in Arabic for the UAE.

All four countries would keep their current two-character Latin suffix - ".eg" for Egypt, ".ru" for Russia, ".sa" for Saudi Arabia and ".ae" for the Emirates.

ICANN has received applications from 16 countries in eight languages since mid-November. Officials would not release details on the ones still under review.

Hacking Passwords Easy As 123456

If you are using "123456" as your password it is past time to stop. Same if you are using the always popular "Password" to protect your account. Those easy-to-hack passwords were the top and fourth most-popular from among 32 million hacked from RockYou.com, a new study finds.

Imperva studied the breached passwords and has published an interesting study that talks about them. While "Consumer Password Worst Practices" isn't about us supposedly savvy business users, as an occasional system administrator I've run into both 123456 and Password on many occasions.

Here are the top passwords Imperva found among those compromised in the attack (they were posted online, without identifying details, for the

world to see - and analyze):

1. 123456 2. 12345 3. 123456789 4. Password 5. iloveyou 6. princess 7. rockyou 8. 1234567 9. 12345678 10. abc123

If any of those look too familiar, please /stop reading this story and change your password now/. All these passwords are easy to crack using simple brute-force automated methods. And with the list now published, they are likely to move to the top of everyone's list of those to try first when attempting to crack an account manually.

"To quantify the issue, the combination of poor passwords and automated attacks means that in just 110 attempts, a hacker will typically gain access to one new account on every second or a mere 17 minutes to break into 1000 accounts," Imperva said in its report.

Among its key findings:

- * About 30 percent of users chose passwords whose length is equal or below six characters.
- * Moreover, almost 60% of users chose their passwords from a limited set of alpha-numeric characters.
- * Nearly 50% of users used names, slang words, dictionary words or trivial passwords (consecutive digits, adjacent keyboard keys, and so on).

If it makes you feel any better, a similar study of hacked Hotmail passwords from 20 years ago found much the same thing.

Imperva provides a list of password best practices, created by NASA to help its users protect their rocket science, they include:

- * It should contain at least eight characters
- * It should contain a mix of four different types of characters - upper case letters, lower case letters, numbers, and special characters such as !@#\$%^&*," If there is only one letter or special character, it should not be either the first or last character in the password.
- * It should not be a name, a slang word, or any word in the dictionary. It should not include any part of your name or your e-mail address.

Following that advice, of course, means you'll create a password that will be impossible, unless you try a trick credited to security guru Bruce Schneir: Turn a sentence into a password.

For example, "Now I lay me down to sleep" might become nilmDOWN2s, a 10-character password that won't be found in any dictionary.

Can't remember that password? Schneir says it's OK to write it down and put it in your wallet, or better yet keep a hint in your wallet. Just don't also include a list of the sites and services that password works with. Try to use a different password on every service, but if you can't do that, at least develop a set of passwords that you use at different sites.

Someday, we will use authentication schemes, perhaps biometrics, that don't require so much jumping through hoops to protect our data. But, in the meantime, passwords are all most of us have, so they ought to be strong enough to do the job.

And don't even try 654321 or Qwerty - 19th and 20th on Imperva's list - OK?

Astronauts Finally Get Internet Access in Space

In a high tech first - really, really high - astronauts in space finally have Internet access.

Space station resident Timothy (TJ) Creamer had been working with flight controllers to establish Internet access from his orbital post ever since he moved in last month. On Friday, his effort paid off. He posted the first live Twitter post truly from space.

"Hello Twitterverse!" he wrote. "We r now LIVE tweeting from the International Space Station -- the 1st live tweet from Space! :) More soon, send your ?s"

Before, orbiting astronauts had to send such Twitter updates by e-mail to Mission Control in Houston. Then controllers posted the tweets.

The International Space Station crew can now use an on-board laptop to reach a desktop computer at Mission Control, and thereby browse the Web. This remote Internet access is possible whenever there is a solid high-speed communication link.

It's expected to provide a big morale boost.

"Long-duration astronauts, they commit to spending months away from family and friends. It's a pretty unique state of isolation," said NASA spokesman Kelly Humphries. "We expect this to enhance morale and productivity."

The astronauts will be subject to the same Internet access guidelines as other on-the-job government employees, namely no interfering with work.

Is NASA worried the astronauts might spend too much time online, more than 200 miles up?

"These are highly driven individuals," Humphries said with a chuckle, "so they're going to get their work done first."

The astronauts already had an Internet Protocol phone for private calls to family and friends.

Creamer is one month into a five-month mission. He is sharing the space station with another American, one Japanese and two Russians.

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